

# Delaware River Atlantic Sturgeon Research



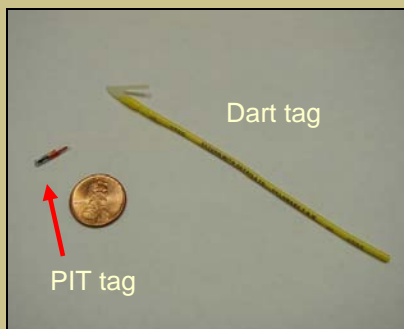
## **ATTENTION!**

Please report any dead Atlantic sturgeon you find along the Delaware River or Bay to the Division of Fish & Wildlife (302) 653-2887. Please note the location, length, and presence of any tags.

## **TAGGING PROGRAM:**

If you happen to find or catch an Atlantic sturgeon please look for tags, write down the tag number, and call the phone number printed on the tag. Tag returns provide important information about the species.

## **What do the tags look like?**



## **Do you know the difference?**



## **For more information on Atlantic sturgeon contact:**

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The Atlantic sturgeon is a prehistoric fish dating back >70 million years. It is found in coastal rivers and waters along the Atlantic Coast from Labrador, Canada to the St. Johns River, FL. Sturgeon have five rows of bony scutes running the length of their body and four sensory barbels in front of an extendable mouth with no teeth. The largest documented Atlantic sturgeon was 14 feet, 811 pounds, and 60 years old. Atlantic Sturgeon are anadromous, meaning they use freshwater rivers for spawning and marine environments for growth and migration. Males usually mature in 12-14 years while females tend to mature in 18-20 years. Adults ascend large coastal rivers for spawning from April-May and spawn at water temperatures from 55-65°F. After hatching, juvenile sturgeon remain in estuarine waters for several years before moving into coastal waters.

The Delaware River once supported the largest and most profitable Atlantic sturgeon fishery along the Atlantic Coast. However, overfishing of spawning adults, poor water quality, and by-catch of juveniles in other fisheries caused the population to collapse prior to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the poor status of Atlantic sturgeon populations along the Atlantic Coast, a coast-wide moratorium was implemented in 1998, prohibiting harvest. The goal of the moratorium is to restore Atlantic sturgeon spawning stocks to levels which will provide sustainable fisheries and ensure viable spawning populations. Currently, the Atlantic sturgeon is listed as an endangered species by the States of Delaware and Pennsylvania.

To assess the Delaware River Atlantic sturgeon population, the Division of Fish & Wildlife conducts gill net surveys in the lower Delaware River. Sturgeon are measured, weighed, and tagged with an external dart tag and internal PIT tag (microchip) prior to release. Since 1991, nearly 1,800 Atlantic sturgeon have been tagged, ranging in size from 20 to 70 inches. The largest sturgeon tagged by the Division was caught in the Delaware River during June 2001 near Wilmington. This sturgeon was nearly 6 feet in length and estimated at 93 pounds. The survey indicates that the lower Delaware River is an important summer feeding ground for immature sturgeon. Sturgeon tagged in the lower Delaware River have been recaptured in coastal waters from North Carolina to Maine with most fish being caught in waters of New Jersey (32%), Delaware (18%), and New York (12%). Results of this program continue to provide important information on the Delaware River Atlantic sturgeon population.

